

The Frontline Fellowship mission teams have come under repeated attack in Sudan. Church services and Bible teaching lectures have been interrupted by air raid warnings or artillery bombardments as everyone has scrambled for cover. The Frontline mission base and school seem to have been especially targeted for repeated aerial bombardments by high flying Antonov bombers or low flying MiGs. Our mission base is now pock-marked with bomb craters and littered with shrapnel.

At one church service, my sermon was interrupted by an artillery bombardment from National Islamic Front government forces. As rockets and shells exploded nearby, everyone scrambled for bomb shelters or trenches. For the next 40 minutes we listened to the whistling sound of rockets passing overhead. The barrage appeared to have been fired from multiple rocket launchers.

When the shelling finally ended, everyone returned to the simple wood and thatch chapel for the rest of the sermon. My message *"A Mighty Fortress is our God"*, based on Psalm 46, seemed most appropriate for the occasion:

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed . . ."

Incredibly, no one was missing! Not only had no member of the congregation been injured by the bombardment but they had all come back to conclude the service!

"God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her at the break of dawn." Psalm 46:5

Schools and Hospitals Bombed

Reports of the intensified bombing campaign of civilian centres were coming from different quarters, even before I left to join our team there. Numerous schools and hospitals in Equatoria province and the Nuba Mountains had been bombed by the Government of Sudan Air Force. The Primary School in Kauda (in the Nuba Mountains), to which Frontline had delivered Arabic Bibles and teaching materials, was bombed on 7 February with 2 adults and 19 children killed. Of the 17 wounded, 3 children needed amputations.

Scorched Earth in the Nuba

The NIF government then launched a four pronged military assault at strategic sites in the Nuba Mountains. Over 8 000 Nuba lost their homes in Buram alone. The Arab forces conducted a scorched earth policy with widespread looting and destruction of agriculture. It appeared that they were attempting to capture the landing strips and thereby prevent the only relief aid which the Nuba are receiving, from a few mission agencies, from getting through.

The hospital which we had helped establish in Western Equatoria was also under regular aerial bombardment.

Answering the Call

Prior to leaving for Sudan, I worked hard and late through several nights to ensure that my desk was cleared, that my family was provided for and that the mission was on a sound footing. It was particularly hard to say goodbye to my children as they had heard of the increased bombings and realised that I was going into some kind of unusually intense danger. There were lots of questions, some tears and serious times of prayer. It made it easier though, that Lenora was, as always, fully supportive of me going. As a daughter of missionaries, who had herself served in Eastern Europe, she had long ago learned to place her father (and now her husband) in God's hands. (We had been married barely six months when I had been captured and imprisoned in Mozambique - so Lenora had weathered adverse times before).

After tree top skimming for some distance, our aircraft came in for landing on a bush airstrip in Western Equatoria. But before we could even begin off-loading, the ominous sound of an Antonov bomber filled the air. Not wanting to be caught on the ground during an air attack, our pilot quickly raced down the runway and took off – with all our cargo! As we headed for cover I was glad that I had my full personal kit and water bottles with me, especially as our ground team had not yet arrived. We were relieved when the bomber continued overhead towards another target.

When the danger had passed our charter aircraft landed again and we promptly off loaded the 6 000 Bibles, Hymn books and Christian books and over 20 000 Gospel leaflets and booklets in 5 languages.

Landmines and Ambushes

Steve and Iris, who had driven overland (7 000 km) from Cape Town, quickly brought me up to date on the intensified bombing campaign, and ambushes on the road from neighbouring Uganda. By God's grace they had just missed an ambush in Northern Uganda. The Ugandan army was engaged in follow up operations as they passed through. This didn't seem to be an ideal time for our newly-weds to be enjoying a "honeymoon" in Sudan!

Everyone was generally tense. Often silence would suddenly descend as people strained to identify a sound. There were some false alarms too, but even these could be fatal. One young woman was killed by a landmine as she fled over a field to take cover in the caves. There were also reports of government infiltrators laying landmines on the roads to the hospital and school. Fortunately, they were intercepted by the resistance forces.

Under the Bombers

The hospital at Lui had been hit particularly hard by the bombing campaign. Most of the patients had fled into the surrounding bush and mountains. Several had already died from lack of medical treatment. Samaritans Purse medical staff expressed their concern that fear of the bombing was killing even more people than the bombing itself – by keeping patients from receiving essential medical treatment.

The hospital normally treated 3 500 patients a month, 75% of whom would die if they didn't receive medical treatment. The Tuberculosis patients had been especially affected with most having scattered into the mountains when the TB ward received a direct hit. On other occasions patients had been strapped in traction as they watched the bombs exploding through the windows. Others were under anaesthetic on the operating table throughout bombing raids. Some patients dragged themselves, with IV drips and epidural spinal taps trailing behind them, as they desperately crawled down the corridors to the bomb shelter!

The ominous drone of the Russian made Antonovs was always the first warning. The most alert would then sound the air raid siren. Everyone then had barely one minute to reach a bomb shelter, or a cave in the nearby mountains, before the first bombs would fall. Next, one could hear a distinctly metallic sound – presumably the bomb bay doors opening. Then a whistling, rushing wind - followed by a tremendous earth shaking, ear splitting explosion. Those close to where the bombs detonated could hear the shrapnel ripping through trees and chopping off branches and chunks of rock.

One group crouching under an overhanging rock were shaken as a bomb exploded directly over them showering the whole area with shrapnel and fragments of rock. Then they were choking as an acrid smelling smoke covered them all in dust. Incredibly none of them were hurt! Bethany described how the hymn *"Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee . . ."* came to mind, along with the Scriptures on God being *"the Rock of our salvation."*

All marvelled at God's protection. If the bomb had landed just 6 feet further, it would have exploded at the mouth of the cave and killed all the medical staff.

The hospital at Lui was bombed six times in just 7 weeks. Each time up to 12 bombs were dropped. Most seemed to be about 250 lbs, some up to 500 lbs in weight. The Antonovs appeared to come in at an altitude of about 14 000 feet. However they came in from different directions and bombed any time from early in the morning to late afternoon. The main targets for the bombers appeared to be the hospital, the Christian Liberty High School and the churches. The market places also seemed to be specifically targeted.

Teachers in the Trenches

On another occasion, while Steve and I were conducting a Biblical Worldview and Christian History Seminar for 80 teachers, the lessons were interrupted as a clearly visible Antonov bomber flew directly overhead. All the teachers scrambled into bomb shelters and trenches outside the lecture rooms. While half of the teachers re-assembled almost immediately afterwards – many scattered and ran so far that even by the end of the day not everyone had ventured back to the lectures yet.

MiGs And Mercenaries

A new development was the appearance of two MiG fighter bombers. As these jets came in low and fast there was practically no warning. By the time one hears them it is too late to reach cover. Steve and Iris were forced off the road as an explosion nearby rocked their vehicle. MiGs screamed overhead as they dived for cover.

Oil Companies Fuel War

There were additional reports that the government of Sudan had acquired new helicopter gunships from Red China. Apparently investments from Western oil companies (Talisman and BP/Amoco) had made these military acquisitions possible. Reportedly Russian mercenary pilots

had been employed by the government of Sudan for the recent bombing campaign. New airstrips and roads built by the oil companies were also being used by the NIF military to attack civilian targets.

Steadfast Under Fire

As a result of the intensified bombing campaign many churches had changed their services to early in the morning or late in the afternoon. I conducted church services in churches that had previously been destroyed by government of Sudan forces, one by a helicopter gunship attack.

But despite the danger and the early times, one rebuilt church was full for Sunday morning worship. And despite another church being surrounded by bomb craters, well over a 1 500 people gathered for the launch of the new translation of the Jesus film into the Moru language.

Bombed Schools Rebuilt

Because of the harvest, the school year in Southern Sudan begins in April, but already some schools had closed because of the bombing. We found a line of bombs laid straight through the grounds of the Christian Liberty High School which had been about to be launched. Miraculously, no one was hurt, although some structures were damaged and bush fires were caused. One bomb landed right next to the bridge which leads to the school, showering shrapnel and rock fragments all over. One pillar of the bridge was damaged and shrapnel went straight through the steel beams.

Church leaders, including the Episcopal Bishop Bullen Dolli, joined in a Dedication Service with Frontline Fellowship at the Christian Liberty High School. Rebuilding and restoring of the badly damaged school buildings commenced immediately.

The markets, once flourishing in these towns, were now empty most of the week – for fear of more bombings. People were killed when Antonovs bombed one market and others had been injured. Many homes had been destroyed in the bombing raids. Everyone seemed to have stories of close calls with flying shrapnel. Many testified of God's miraculous protection. Most of the trees were scarred with shrapnel.

Film Evangelism

Everywhere we travelled we received enthusiastic welcomes from the long suffering Christians. They were so grateful that we had come to be with them in their time of trial. It meant so much to them to know that they were not alone, that they were not forgotten.

We were able to visit and minister in most of the towns and villages that had been subjected to the bombardments. It was a particular blessing that we could introduce the new Jesus film in the Moru language. As this was the very first occasion that they had ever seen a film in their own language, there was great excitement and some tears of joy.

We had also, for the first time, brought in a video projector. So we were able to, on some nights, show the communities different video documentaries we had helped produce to mobilise prayer and pressure in support of the beleaguered Christians in Sudan.

On some occasions we were able to screen the epic film *"Khartoum"* on the English Christian general, Charles Gordon, who had eradicated the slave trade in Sudan and later died defending Khartoum in 1885. The people were thrilled to see their great hero

"Gordon Pasha"

depicted in such a spectacular film. Many afterwards went back to re-read my chapter on General Gordon in the

"Faith Under Fire in Sudan"

book. Gordon was the topic of many conversations in the following weeks.

These videos were other ways for us to encourage and inspire communities which had been severely demoralised by the intensified terror bombing campaign.

Leadership Training

Despite the disruptions from Antonov bombers, MiG jets, artillery, rocket and mortar bombardments, we were able to complete some important leadership training courses for teachers, pastors and chaplains. Our Biblical Worldview and Christian History Seminar was well received by the 80 school teachers, most of whom had attended previous Frontline training courses. Numerous teachers won book awards and Christian flags for their schools. So far these teachers had established 120 primary schools.

We then travelled to the battlefield where military chaplains in the SPLA gathered together for another Chaplains Training Course. When we began our work in Sudan in 1995, there were no chaplains. Today, by God's grace, we are supporting 7 ordained Chaplains and 63 Assistant Chaplains.

It was a great encouragement to hear of the coming to faith in Christ of many hundreds of SPLA soldiers. There was a great hunger for Gospel literature and we equipped some chaplains with short-wave radios for Gospel radio broadcasts.

Because of the bombing, and the lack of transport, we were only able to gather 17 pastors together for our Pastors Training Course. Even though bombing continued throughout the district, it was a blessed time of Bible study and training.

I was also able to have some important discussions with civil and church leaders concerning our plans to launch a Bible College, a Christian radio station and wildlife sanctuary as part of our mission base. This was all approved – from the County Commissioner, the Bishop and the local Chief. Already people had started bringing us little orphaned animals – bucks and monkeys mostly – for us to care for. Our reputation as animal lovers and my regular emphasis on the importance of nature conservation and kindness to animals was having an impact. Now our base area between two rivers was officially a wildlife sanctuary.

Protection Under Fire

My exit flight brought in more literature and 300 kg of medical supplies for the hospital. Just minutes after we took off 2 MiGs thundered over our mission base and dropped 2 large bombs. Steve and Iris were driving back from the airstrip when a huge explosion rocked the vehicle and forced them off the road into the bush. They had no sooner dived face down on the ground when a second bomb exploded and they heard the MiGs thundering overhead. Shortly after that Steve and Iris were shelled by mortars – at night. The mortar bombardment continued for an hour while our missionaries crouched for cover in a trench.

Then, in less than a week, the Frontline mission base was bombed 3 times – by MiGs and Antonovs. A total of 47 bombs were dropped on our school, chapel and base, just in that week. Incredibly, despite the vast amount of explosive ordinance and shrapnel expended, no one was killed or seriously injured! As Steve wrote in his report: *"The only way to explain some 47 bombs being dropped on us and no one being seriously hurt . . . is that God has been merciful*

and has protected! We are staying and we are calling for help from the outside. We are defenceless against these bombers and jet fighters. Our help and our salvation is from God alone. Should there be Antonovs or MiGs everyday we will not be moved. God is greater. We don't know how many more times we will have been hit by the time you read this . . . or even if we will still be alive.

'In God is my salvation and my glory, the Rock of my strength and my refuge is in God.'
Psalm 62:7"

Steve also made this appeal in his letter from the field: *"Please mobilise prayer and action. We need to persuade the oil companies (Talisman and BP Amoco) to stop funding the government of Sudan. The NIF government is not using the money to build hospitals, schools and roads. They are hiring Russian mercenaries to fly their new MiGs to bomb civilian targets – like our school – everyday."*

Please continue to pray for our Sudan team: Steve, Iris, and for the beleaguered Christians in Southern Sudan.

Dr. Peter Hammond

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[Faith Under Fire in Sudan](#)