

## **What else can go wrong on a mission trip?**

"Don't go to Sudan. There are orders to arrest you and Bishop Bullen," I was warned.

"There have been serious threats made. Your lives could be in dan



I was informed that within an hour of me flying out of Sudan in January, a truckload of soldiers had arrived

Despite numerous warnings, Bishop Bullen Dolli and I determined to fly into Southern Sudan for the East

## Easter in Lui

At the airstrip, an enthusiastic choir singing joyful hymns welcomed us. On Good Friday, I preached in th

On Easter Sunday, I was officially received into membership of Lui Diocese as a minister of the evangel

The ECS is the largest Protestant denomination in Sudan and it is Reformed and evangelistic. I preache

Most evenings, the Frontline team: Tim, Hansie and Michael held film evangelism meetings – either in th

Thousands flocked to see Jeremiah Films new video Terrorism and Persecution - Understanding Islamic

## Working for Reformation

For leadership training, I conducted a Biblical Worldview Seminar in Kotobi and a God and Government

Before going to Yei I spent several days at the Christian Liberty High School, teaching on the history of t

## Anniversary Celebrations

The first anniversary of the opening of Christian Liberty High School (CHLS) was celebrated with a spec

*"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"*

The Teachers' T-shirts declared:

*"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correction and training in righteousness."*

The workers on the base also received a T-shirt each. Their verse is:

*"Whatever you do, work ~~Colossians 3:23~~ ~~Colossians 3:23~~ heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."*

"There are those who would like to kill you"

Several people, including soldiers, warned the Bishop and I not to go to Yei. They were convinced that c

*"The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?"* Psalm 27

## **Flying into Captivity**

The charter aircraft that we had booked needed maintenance, so the charter company sent us two small

We learnt later that the radio message that two aircraft were coming, instead of one, was not forwarded

*"The angel of the Lord encamps <sup>Psalm 34:7</sup> around those who fear Him and He delivers them."*

## Tribal Tensions

In Yei, we were immediately made aware of several intrigues and undercurrents that were complicating

As the Dinka cattle had trampled on and eaten much of the crops of the subsistence farmers in Equatori

The community was unanimous – the Dinka cattle herders and their herds must return to their own area

The Dinka people are the vast majority in the South – approximately 1,7million. The Zande are just over

Now, after 11 years, the cattle herders were returning to Dinkaland. However, most of the leadership of t

### **Accusations and Threats**

When the charges against us became known, it certainly seemed to be connected with the eviction of th



The accusations were that: Bishop Bullen Dolli and myself were in touch with the Khartoum

government; we were arming the Moru people to revolt against the Dinka leadership of the

SPLA; to separate Moruland from the rest of the liberated New Sudan; to invite the Arabs back

into Moruland and to cause a split in the SPLA.

*"... he speaks falsely, while his heart gathers slander; then he goes out and spreads it abroad.*

*All my enemies whisper together against me; they imagine the worst ..."* Psalm 41: 6 - 7

There were fears expressed about our safety and we were warned not to venture outside of the

compound without an escort. We were also informed that the security at the compound we were

staying at had been increased.

*"... Malice and abuse are within it. Destructive forces are at work in the city; threats and lies*

*never leave its streets."* Psalm 55: 10 -11

### **Welcome and Warnings**

We were warmly welcomed by the Governor of Equatoria, Samuel Abu John Kabasi. Governor Abu John was a veteran of the first war, Anyanya 1 (1955 – 1972). By the end of the war, Samuel Abu John had risen to being second-in-command of the resistance movement. He later attained the rank of Major General. The governor is one of the most senior veterans in the SPLA. Governor Abu John had been one of the very first leaders to welcome us to Equatoria, when we began our ministry there early in 1996. The governor was fully aware of the accusations against us and the intrigues to undermine our work in Southern Sudan. He warned us that we had numerous enemies who were working tirelessly to slander us. As on previous occasions, I found the governor well informed and astute. We had the opportunity to show the new Jeremiah Films video, *Terrorism & Persecution*, to the governor in a private showing.

### **Overcoming Sabotage**

From the first day in Yei, we found that much had been done to undermine our itinerary. We were informed that the planned seminar had been suspended, and there was much uncertainty. However, with a few strategic meetings, Bishop Bullen was able to set in motion new arrangements to conduct a God & Government Seminar, and church services for each of our team members to preach at on Sunday morning. We also planned to conduct outdoor film evangelism outreaches every evening in different languages, outside the cathedral.

Complications abounded. Every couple of hours some new threat or challenge surfaced. Our host, Rev Wesley, had to rush around to the Commissioner of police and the local authorities when there was an attempt to cancel our outdoor film evangelism. As a curfew was enforced, and as there had even been nighttime bombings of Yei in the past, special permission needed to be obtained. Then some officials saw something sinister in the fact that two planes, instead of the expected one, had arrived to bring our team in.

### **Passports Seized**

Shortly after seeing the governor, we received a summons from the Director of Public Security. The governor was surprised at this, and sent his personal assistant with us. When the Director of Public Security saw the governor's assistant, he was plainly surprised and requested him to wait outside as he had "work to do" with us. The governor's representative, Lexton, informed the Director of Public Security that as these were the governor's guests, he was instructed to observe the proceedings. More negotiating followed.

Finally it was agreed that our host and the governor's representative would wait just outside. Now we were expecting the interrogation to begin. Instead, the Director of Public Security demanded our passports and travel documents, and then told us we were free to go - but we had to return first thing on Monday morning for interrogation. He specifically told us that he did not want to interfere with our church services on Sunday, but that our documents were being held while they investigated various charges brought against us. Our film evangelism programme that night was cancelled.

More discussions and questions followed. Our hosts were plainly becoming more and more concerned. We were informed that the tribal tensions concerning the eviction of the Dinka cattlemen and their herds from Moruland was being exacerbated by the incessant accusations of some foreigners.

"These accusations are coming from your people" I was told.

"What do you mean, my people?" I asked.

"It's coming from white people".

"Well" I said, "not all white people are the same. They certainly can't be called my people, if they are so against missionaries."

"These are your brothers," I was told. "These are people who call themselves Christians, even missionaries. They used to work for you!" More details of the incredible accusations and intricate plot were revealed every day, and with each interrogation. They told me that a disgruntled ex-Frontline Fellowship worker, whom I had dismissed, was one of the main people making these accusations.

*"Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." Psalm 41:9*

## Preaching Under Arrest

Late on Saturday night, we were informed that several of our church services planned for Sunday morning had to be cancelled for security reasons. Despite the fact that we were the guests of the governor, and that we were being investigated, there were fears that some individuals would take the law into their own hands and attempt to murder us. Reports came in that there were plans to have us poisoned and if that failed, to have us ambushed on the road. There was concern that our lives would be in danger if we attempted to go ahead with the services planned at the Dinka congregation and at other places on the other side of town. As a result, three of the planned services were cancelled and all of our team members combined for the Communion service in the cathedral.

*"For I hear the slander of many ... they conspire against me and plot to take my life." Psalm 31:13*

### **Bomb Scarred Cathedral**

While Kenneth and Jeffrey went to conduct the Sunday morning service for the Moru congregation close by, Bishop Bullen, Michael, Timothy and I went to the cathedral. The well-built Yei cathedral bore the scars of many aerial bombardments. Shrapnel scars in the roof, walls and windows testified of the aerial bombardments by the Sudan Air Force. We arrived to choirs of young people singing joyful hymns. Timothy and Michael gave testimonies, I preached the sermon and Bishop Bullen conducted a communion service. Afterwards we delivered and distributed large quantities of Gospel literature in Bari, Zande and Arabic. I was informed that there were people from the Public Security office listening carefully to what was said and preached. (Later we were told that they had been most impressed and affected).

### **Jesus in Bari**

That night, we had the joy of screening the Jesus film in the Bari language, for the first time in Bariland. One of the translators who had worked on the film project saw the film himself for the first time that night. This was the first film that had ever been produced in the Bari language, and there was much excitement to hear two hours of the Gospel screened in their own language.

### **Chief of Staff**

The next morning, Governor Abu John took our team to meet the Chief of Staff of the SPLA, Commander Silva Kiir Mayadit. Commander Silva is the second in command of the SPLA. He received us most graciously, and listened carefully and patiently to our concerns. He said he

was sorry for the regrettable mistreatment of our missionary, Tim Keller, when he had been arrested, threatened with being shot and our mission radio confiscated. He was shocked and saddened to hear that the radios we had donated to the Episcopal Church of Sudan had also been confiscated, and two church radio operators, Joseph and Dominic, had been whipped with over 75 lashes each for resisting handing over the radios to the soldiers.

The complications and tensions involved in the return of the Dinka cattle herders to their own lands, was also discussed.

Our almost 4-hour meeting with the Chief of Staff was opened and closed in prayer and the Commander then supplied a letter instructing the Director of Public Security to give us back our passports and travel documents, so that we would not be delayed in departing on our scheduled aircraft the next day.

### **Summoned from the Seminar**

Everyone was most relieved and encouraged after this very positive meeting with the Chief of Staff. The Governor drove us to the Public Security Office, to drop off the letter, instructing them to return our passports. We then rushed back to the Cathedral in order to continue the God & Government Seminar, which I had begun earlier that day, and which Rev. Jeffrey was conducting.

There were numerous civil leaders, including the Commissioner, at this Leadership Training course. I was barely ½ hour into my lecture on the necessity for the rule of law, for respect for life and property, and due process, when a summons arrived for me to come immediately downtown for an interrogation with Military Intelligence! I wanted to first complete the seminar, but my hosts, who looked most serious, insisted that I had to go immediately. The participants were shocked. This incident seemed to highlight the importance of the principles we were teaching.

*"For God is the King of all the earth ... God reigns over the nations ..."* Psalm 47: 7 - 8

### **Interrogation**

The Bishop and I were separately interrogated by a Board of combined Military Intelligence and

Public Security officials over the next 4 hours.

As the interrogation proceeded, it became clear that some of the interrogators found the charges quite incredible and were just trying to get to the bottom of this intrigue. There was plainly much respect for our work and track record. The questions were respectful and objective. And, in fact, on several occasions I was told: "You've done nothing wrong. You have been a great friend to the movement. Please do not be discouraged by all of these accusations. We need you to continue to do just what you've been doing, to even do more."

At the end, we all stood up and, holding hands, concluded in prayer. The Military Intelligence interrogators assured us that as far as they were concerned, the matter was resolved, we were cleared and they were sure we would get our passports back within the hour. Later we were informed that perhaps we would only get our passports back later that night or early the next morning.

### **God's Story in Arabic**

As the sun was already setting, I raced back to the church to join Timothy as he prepared to show the Jesus film in Arabic. However, there was a part that had malfunctioned in the video machine, and we had no spare. With the people assembling to see the advertised Jesus film in Arabic, we had to make a plan quickly. As we had God's Story in our VCD evangelism kit, we connected the VCD player into the video projector and were able to screen God's Story in Arabic.

There was great enthusiasm about this powerful Gospel presentation, which begins with Creation and the Fall, and goes all the way through to the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. As on other occasions, this very compelling video production made a great impact on all who attended.

### **Midnight Visit**

As our plane was coming in at 8:00am in the morning, we packed as much as we could and were just getting under our mosquito nets, into our sleeping bags, when there was some commotion at the gate. It was the Director of Public Security at 11:30pm! And he didn't come with good news. Despite the positive response of the Military Intelligence Committee that had interrogated us that afternoon, he announced that he was not satisfied with the results, that his work was not yet complete and that we were not yet free to go. He would continue to hold my

passport and that Bishop Bullen and myself were not allowed to leave.

As the chartered aircraft was already prepositioned on the border, and as its cargo of Bibles, bicycles and other equipment had already been loaded that evening, and as the radio operators would not be on their station before 7:00am in the morning, there was nothing much we could do. Reports also reached us that there were serious threats to assassinate the Bishop and I. There was concern that a petrol bomb or grenade could be thrown over the fence on our huts and that we might be shot down while fleeing from our burning tukels.

*"Strangers are attacking me; ruthless men seek my life." Psalm 54:3*

### **Murderous Threats**

After somewhat of a sleepless night, we were up early - long before sunrise. Some of our team went to the Governor to request his intervention. As soon as the radio operator came to the compound, we sent off an urgent communication to the charter pilot, urging him to delay the flight as long as possible. By God's grace, he had not taken off yet and was able to hold off until 12 noon. This gave us some more time to seek intervention by the Chief of Staff and the Governor.

As the morning progressed, more and more reports came in that indicated that the situation was actually far worse than we had appreciated. "Your accusers are tireless, it seems that their main purpose in life is to discredit you and the Bishop. Every day there are new accusations. This man that you dismissed from your mission has been in the Public Security Office, even this morning, handing over more papers, with accusations and information to use against you. Some of your investigators are most concerned that should you be released, that the threat to your life would increase. There are those Dinka commanders who have been influenced by your accusers so much that they would kill you out of hand".

*"... If a foe were raising himself against me ... but it is you. My companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship." Psalm 55: 12 - 13*

"Surely we could be provided with an escort?" I asked.

"There is no escort that would be sufficient to protect you from the kind of people who are determined to have you killed", I was informed.

By now the information came in that our pilot was en-route and due to land at the airstrip just after noon. Some decisions needed to be made. "If you or the Bishop attempt to leave, you will be killed," we were bluntly informed.

*"Those who seek my life set their traps ... all day long they plot deception" Psalm 38:12*

"Well, what about the rest of our team?" It was felt that there was no restriction on them leaving. So, I urged the rest of our team to prepare to leave on this flight. They all expressed their willingness to stay with the Bishop and I. I assured them that they could be of more use to us outside than in Yei. They had their own ministry responsibilities to attend to. Tim, Michael and Jeffrey headed for the airstrip.

Canon Kenneth Baringwa insisted on staying behind with us. En-route the vehicle was stopped at a checkpoint and the security officials looked to see if the Bishop or I were present in the vehicle. Somehow, they missed Timothy.

As Tim had been the first one arrested back in December, and as we had information that they were also after him, this seemed to have been an oversight. But Timothy, sitting in the back of the truck, was apparently overlooked and escaped.

The flight came in and delivered boxes of Gospel literature in Bari, and took our team back to Mundri with more bicycles, books and equipment for the churches there.

Rev. Jeffrey, as the Secretary of the Diocese of Lui, had to begin the Synod (which only occurs every 3 years). Michael rejoined Hansie to work at our mission base, renovating the buildings and running the school. Timothy returned to Kenya and informed the SPLA authorities in Nairobi of our arrest. This set a whole sequence of events in motion.

*"... call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour Me." Psalm 50:15*

### **Victims of Disinformation**

There were other interrogations. In one of the interrogations, I was informed that the security people had received information from sources within the Khartoum government, that the National Islamic Front was going to place 4 short-wave radios into Western Equatoria for espionage purposes. When Frontline Fellowship brought in three radios for the churches last year, it was assumed that Bishop Bullen Dolli and myself must be the ones in contact with the Arabs. It was at this point that arrest warrants were issued for the Bishop and myself.

This information helped us all make some sense of the whole intrigue. After the Lui Cathedral was bombed by the Sudan Air Force on 28 December 2000, it was 3 weeks before we even learned of it. Realising the desperate need for communications equipment, Frontline Fellowship began to make it known that there was a need for short-wave radios for communication in Southern Sudan. This project was fairly well known and it would have been very easy for the government of Sudan to exploit this opportunity for their own purposes. It is now believed that this was a disinformation campaign, orchestrated by the Sudan government, to cause problems for our missionaries and for the churches, as well as to discredit the SPLA for arresting Christian leaders. Had the plans to murder Bishop Bullen and I been successful, then this campaign would have been even more effective as the blame for our deaths could also then be attributed to the SPLA.

*"Your tongue plots destruction. It is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. You love evil ... falsehood ... and grew strong by destroying others." Psalm 52: 2 - 7*

Bishop Bullen Dolli is well known for his strong public stand against the National Islamic Front government. He recently received an award for defending religious freedom, from the Institute for Religion and Democracy in Washington DC. Throughout 35 States he testified of the NIF's brutal religious persecution of Christians in Southern Sudan.

Bishop Bullen's cathedral in Lui is still in ruins from a bombing campaign by the Sudan Air Force. It seemed particularly incredible that the Bishop could be accused of collaborating with the Islamic regime, as his only brother was dragged behind a car and then burned alive by them.

My own writings and work of behalf of the suffering Christians in Sudan is also well known internationally, particularly my Faith Under Fire in Sudan book and the various videos which we have helped produce. The government of Sudan has even published articles on their official website, which states that: "Peter Hammond should expect to be bombed when he comes to Sudan ... Hammond should expect to be shot on sight ... because his writings make him an enemy of the State." To harass and undermine the ministry of this conservative, evangelical Bishop and our outspoken mission, would obviously suit the purposes of the persecutors in Khartoum.

To arrange for our deaths, would also have removed two of the most outspoken and internationally well-connected Christians campaigning for religious freedom in Southern Sudan. Had this elaborate intrigue succeeded, it would have seriously eroded support for the SPLA. The vast majority of the supporters of the SPLA in Sudan are Christians, and most of the foreign support also comes from Christians. To have convinced the SPLA to arrest such well known Christians leaders, who have so vigorously worked to expose the atrocities of the government of Sudan, was a serious setback for the resistance and a victory for the Islamic dictatorship.

*"They dug a pit in my path – but they have fallen into it themselves. My heart is steadfast ... I will praise You, O Lord, among the nations."* Psalm 57: 6 - 9

### **International Prayer and Pressure**

As it became known that Bishop Bullen Dolli and I were detained in Yei, articles were written from accross the world When the Bishop failed to arrive in Lui for the Synod, and it became known that I had not boarded my chartered aircraft, and therefore was going to miss other flight connections and meetings scheduled, it was assumed that we must have been arrested. Phone and fax lines hummed. Many e-mails went around the world. Soon, the SPLA Office office in Nairobi was receiving hundreds of e-mails, faxes and phone calls, from concerned people world wide. Even the British Foreign Office and US State Department contacted the SPLA, expressing their concern for the safety of Bishop Bullen Dolli and myself. Prayer and pressure provide protection for the persecuted.

When the leader of the SPLA, Dr. John Garang was informed of our arrest, he asked: "surely that is not the same Peter Hammond who wrote Faith Under Fire in Sudan?" When he was told that it was, he groaned and said: "Now it is Peter Hammond himself who is under fire in Sudan"! As Commander Garang had met with Bishop Bullen just recently, and had given his assurance that nobody would dare arrest such a respected Christian leader as Bishop Bullen, he was reportedly most angry.

### **Released – but not out of danger**

Orders were then issued that Bishop Bullen Dolli and Dr. Peter Hammond were cleared of all charges and were free to travel anywhere in the New Sudan. SPLA Commanders were also instructed to provide us with every protection.

When I saw the Director of Public Security and Deputy-Chief of Military Intelligence the next time, they were in full military uniform, they were most polite and friendly, and after returning my passport and travel documents, we concluded our time with them in prayer.

And so we were released and free to fly out of Yei on Thursday April 11th. However, there were still serious concerns about our safety and speculation as to what some of those with murderous intentions may decide to do in the light of this new development.

### **Torrential Rain**

I woke up to rain splashing onto my face, through the thatched roof and mosquito net. Outside torrential rain was pouring. The rainy season had begun in earnest. I wondered if the plane would be able to land in such conditions. The torrential rain continued all morning. Even as we were driving out of town to the airstrip, we were driving through large mud pools and with constant rain. We kept praying.

### **Answered prayers**

Incredibly, as we drove onto the airstrip, we drove into sunshine. The rain was still falling heavily on three sides, but the airstrip was clear. There were some puddles on the airstrip, but the ground was hard enough for landing. Shortly after that, we heard the welcome sound of the charter aircraft, and soon we saw the plane break through the clouds, circle the airstrip and come in for a slightly damp landing. Arrested in Yei ...

The pilot informed us that we had been the subject of some serious prayer. The very fact that this aircraft was on its way to Mundri and able to divert to pick us up in Yei, was just one such answer to prayer. The fact that the Lord kept the rain away from the airstrip, to make possible the landing, was another major answer to prayer. We were able to fly to Mundri and deliver the Bishop and Canon Kenneth to the Synod, and then pick up some other missionaries who were needing to be flown out from that location.

The rainy season had definitely started. We flew through clouds and over very green and wet areas. It took four flights to get me to Nairobi, and another two to get me back to Cape Town. All along the way, I met Christians who had been praying for us, and who were rejoicing that the Lord had once again answered prayers, opened prison doors and set the captives free. We continued to praise God that He works all things together for good, for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). And that God is able to take what man means for evil, and use it for good (Genesis 50:20). By God's grace I was able to make our missions 20th Anniversary celebrations in Cape Town and now a Missions Conference in KwaZulu/Natal.



We continue to pray that the Lord would use this situation for His glory, to mobilise more prayer and su

***"Trust in the Lord and do good; ... delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways when they carry out their wicked schemes ... the salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; He is their stronghold in times of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in Him."*** Psalm 37: 3 – 40

For all those who prayed and worked for our release, thank you very much. We are most grateful, and we will seek to work even more diligently and effectively, as God has been so gracious as to give us a new lease of life and liberty.

Dr. Peter Hammond

Related Resources:-

Films on Sudan on 1 DVD

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[Doctor comes to Lui](#)

